

IMAGE DATA PROCESSOR AND IMAGE DATA PROCESSING METHOD

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

5 The present invention relates to an image data processor and an image data processing method for applying a conversion process to an ordinary image to obtain an image to which a special effect processing is applied.

2. Description of the Related Art

10 Fig. 8 is a block diagram schematically showing a structure of a conventional image capturing device. The image capturing device shown in Fig. 8 comprises a CCD image sensor (solid-state image capturing element) 1, a CCD driver circuit 2, a timing controller circuit 3, an analog signal processor circuit 4, an A/D converter circuit 5, and a digital signal processor circuit 6.

15 The solid-state image capturing element 1 has a light receiving region which includes a plurality of light receiving pixels arranged in a matrix, receives, in each light receiving pixel, light incident on the light receiving region, and generates information charges through photoelectric conversion. The solid-state image capturing element 1 accumulates, in each light receiving pixel, the information charges during a predetermined accumulation period and then sequentially transfers the accumulated charges through a plurality of shift registers. The transferred charges are converted into
20 voltage values by an output unit provided on the final stage of the transfer route and is output as an image signal $Y0(t)$.

25 The CCD driver circuit 2 generates a plurality of clock pulses synchronized with a vertical synchronization signal VT and a horizontal synchronization signal HT supplied from the timing

controller circuit 3 as will be described below. The CCD driver circuit 2 supplies the generated clock pulses to the solid-state image capturing element 1 and drives the solid-state image capturing element 1 to sequentially transfer the information charges accumulated in the plurality of light receiving pixels.

The timing controller circuit 3 counts a reference clock CK and generates a vertical synchronization signal VT and a horizontal synchronization signal HT and determines the vertical scanning period and the horizontal scanning period for the solid-state image capturing element 1. For example, when the device functions according to the NTSC standards, the timing controller circuit 3 divides a reference clock CK having a frequency which is 4 times the frequency 3.58 MHz of a color subcarrier wave used in signal processing steps into 1/910 to generate a horizontal synchronization signal HT. Similarly, the timing controller 3 divides the horizontal synchronization signal HT into 2/525 to generate a vertical synchronization signal VT.

The analog signal processor circuit 4 applies an analog signal process such as a CDS (Correlated Double Sampling) and AGC (Automatic Gain Control) to the image signal $Y0(t)$ output from the solid-state image capturing element 1 to generate an image signal $Y1(t)$. The A/D converter circuit 5 digitizes the image signal $Y1(t)$ in synchronization with the operation timing of the solid-state image capturing element 1 to convert the signal to a digital signal and outputs the digital signal as image data $Y0(n)$.

The digital signal processor circuit 6 applies a digital signal process such as color separation and matrix calculation to the image data $Y0(n)$ output from the A/D converter circuit 5 and generates image data $Y1(n)$ which includes brightness data and color-difference

data.

The image data $Y1(n)$ output from the digital signal processor circuit 6 is stored in a storage medium such as a semiconductor memory and a magnetic disk, and, at the same time, is supplied to
5 a driver device for driving a display device such as an LCD panel.

In an image capturing device as described, additional processes are applied such as, for example, a process to obtain a binary image by comparing the data of each pixel in the image data to a threshold value and a process to apply differentiation in the vertical or
10 horizontal direction of the pixel data, and to display an image according to the differentiated values to thereby display an image while emphasizing the outline of the image. In addition, various signaling processes for obtaining various replayed images have been proposed.

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SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to one aspect of the present invention, a histogram of the brightness distribution of pixel data corresponding to a target pixel to be processed and a plurality of peripheral pixels
20 adjacent to the target pixel is created and the pixel data of the target pixel is replaced with a value determined based on the maximum value in the histogram. With this structure, it is possible to convert an ordinary image into an image in a form similar to a rough image or a draft-design image.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a block diagram schematically showing a structure of an image processor according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 2 is an explanatory diagram showing arrangement of pixels in a CCD image sensor.

Fig. 3 is a flowchart for explaining a process executed by a draft-design processor circuit.

5 Fig. 4 is an explanatory diagram for explaining a process by a histogram circuit.

Fig. 5 is a block diagram schematically showing a digit-complementing circuit.

Fig. 6 is an example image showing an image before a process
10 in a draft-design mode.

Fig. 7 is an example image showing an image after a process in a draft-design mode.

Fig. 8 is a block diagram schematically showing a structure of a conventional image capturing device.

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DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

An image processor according to the preferred embodiment of the present invention will now be described with reference to the drawings.

20 Fig. 1 is a block diagram schematically showing a structure of an image processor according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

The image processor comprises an A/D converter circuit 10 for digitizing image data sent from a CCD image sensor to capture an
25 image of a scene or the like to convert an analog signal to a digital signal, a draft-design processor circuit 20 for converting image data into a display format like a draft-design image, a selector 22 for selectively outputting one of a signal directly input from the A/D converter circuit 10 and a signal input through the

draft-design processor circuit 20, a brightness signal generator circuit 24 for generating a brightness signal based on a signal output from the selector 22, and a color signal generator circuit 26 for generating a color signal.

5 A sequence of processes executed by the image processor will now be described in detail.

 An image signal output from a CCD image sensor is input to the A/D converter circuit 10. Here, the CCD image sensor in the embodiment is a color image sensor, for example, to which color
10 filters are mounted in a mosaic-arrangement as shown in Fig. 2 and each color component is assigned to light receiving pixels of the CCD image sensor in an orderly manner. In each pixel in this structure, charges corresponding to light of the color of the color filter mounted on the pixel are accumulated. In other words, in each pixel,
15 charges corresponding to the brightness value of the corresponding color are obtained. The CCD image sensor sequentially outputs, for the accumulated charges for pixels in each frame from a horizontal line of the lower side by one line. Thus, the image signal output from the CCD image sensor is an analog signal containing a pixel
20 signal corresponding to the brightness value of each pixel in one frame.

 The image signal is sequentially input to the A/D converter circuit 10 in beginning with the signal for pixels of the horizontal line on the lower side. The A/D converter circuit 10 converts the
25 image signal from an analog signal to a digital signal to generate image data and outputs the image data to the selector 22 and to a memory circuit 12.

 The image data output from the A/D converter circuit 10 is input to the selector 22 and to the draft-design processor circuit

20. The image data input to the draft-design processor circuit 20 is processed within the draft-design processor circuit 20 and then is input to the selector 22. The selector 22 outputs the image data directly input from the A/D converter circuit 10 to the selector
5 22 to the brightness signal generator circuit 24 and to the color signal generator circuit 26 during a regular image capturing mode. When, on the other hand, a user wishes to convert an ordinary image into a display format like a draft-design image, a draft-design mode selection signal is input to the selector 22 by the user. In
10 this case, the selector 22 outputs data input through the draft-design processor circuit 20 to the brightness signal generator circuit 24 and to the color signal generator circuit 26.

Fig. 3 is a flowchart for explaining a process of data conversion. A data conversion process executed by the draft-design processor
15 circuit 20 will now be described referring to Fig. 3.

First, in step S1, an analog image signal output from an analog signal processor circuit (not shown) is digitized by the A/D converter circuit 10 to generate first image data which is a digital signal. The first image data contains pixel data of a target pixel and pixel
20 data of a plurality of peripheral pixels adjacent the target pixel.

Then, in step S2, the memory circuit 12 sequentially stores pixel data of the target pixel to be processed and pixel data of a plurality of peripheral pixels which are assigned the same color component as the target pixel each time pixel data is input from
25 the A/D converter circuit 10. For example, when pixel data of (column 3, row b) in Fig. 2 is input, pixel data of six adjacent pixels which are assigned a color filter of green G, (column 3, row b), (column 5, row b), (column 7, row b), (column 3, row d), (column 5, row d), and (column 7, row d) are stored. Among these six pixels,

the lower center pixel (column 5, row d) is positioned approximately in the center, and thus, is set as the target pixel. Then, when the pixel data of a pixel (column 2, row b) which follows the pixel (column 3, row b) is input, pixel data of six adjacent pixels to which a color filter of blue B is assigned, (column 2, row b), (column 4, row b), (column 6, row b), (column 2, row d), (column 4, row d), and (column 6, row d) are stored. By repeating these processes, a plurality of peripheral pixels adjacent the target pixel are sequentially stored.

10 Next, in step S3, a most significant bit extractor circuit 14 reads pixel data stored in the memory circuit 12 and extracts only the data of 4 most significant bits from each pixel data and outputs the 4-bit pixel data to a histogram circuit 16. For example, when the pixel data is "11010010", the 4 most significant bits, 15 "1101" are extracted. In this manner, by extracting the most significant bits of the pixel data to reduce the number of bits, 256-gradation represented by 8 bits is converted to 16-gradation represented by 4 bits. As a result, the amount of data to be processed can be reduced, the processor circuit can be simplified, and the 20 processing speed can be improved. The number of most significant bits of the pixel data extracted in the process of step S3 is not limited to 4 bits, and the number may be a number larger or smaller than 4 bits.

Then, in step S4, the histogram circuit 16 generates a histogram 25 of a brightness distribution as shown in Fig. 4 with respect to six input 4-bit data. In Fig. 4, pixel data of six pixels corresponding to the color component of G as shown in Fig. 2 are used, with the pixel of (column 5, row d) as the target pixel P0 and the pixels of (column 3, row b), (column 5, row b), (column

7, row b), (column 3, row d), and (column 7, row d) as peripheral pixels P1 - P5.

Next, in step S5, a data processor circuit 17 replaces the pixel data P0(d) of the target pixel P0 with a maximum value of the histogram (maximum value of the frequency of occurrence). More specifically, numbers of pixels having the same brightness level among the pixel data are counted and a maximum value of the numbers of pixels is output as new pixel data P0'(d) of the target pixel P0. For example, when the signal levels P0(d) - P5(d) of the pixel data of six pixels P0 - P5 converted to 16-gradation are "14", "13", "13", "11", "12", and "13" as shown in Fig. 4, the numbers of pixels having the same level are, respectively, one pixel having a level of "11", one pixel having a level of "12", three pixels having a level of "13", and one pixel having a level of "14". Thus, in step S5, the numbers of pixels having the same level are referenced and the maximum value, "3", among the numbers of pixels is output as the pixel data P0'(d) of the target pixel P0. In this process, because the range of determination includes only 6 pixels, the value to be output is a value from 1 to 6. Therefore, the output data corresponds to 3-bit data of "001" to "110".

Next, in step S6, a digit-complementing circuit 18 converts the pixel data P0'(d) into data having a number of bits suitable to be output to the brightness signal generator circuit and color signal generator circuit. Fig. 5 is a block diagram showing the digit-complementing circuit 18. In this example, because data of 3 bits is output from the histogram circuit, the data is multiplied by 2^5 by a digit adder section 40 to add 5 bits of 0 to the side of least significant bits of the 3-bit data so that the data is converted into data of 8 bits suitable to be output to the brightness

signal generator circuit 24 or the like.

As described above, the value of the 3-bit data of the pixel data $P0'(d)$ is represented from "001" to "110". Accordingly, the output of the digit adder section 40 is "00100000" to "11000000".

5 A brightness adjusting section 42 adds "11111" to the 8-bit data output from the digit adder section 40. With this process, the maximum value of the 8-bit data output from the digit-complementing circuit 18 becomes "11011111", which allows for a more effective use of 8 bits and a display with higher brightness, and, consequently,

10 a clearer image display. The process by the draft-design processor circuit 20 is completed with the completion of the process of step S6.

In this process, it is also possible to suitably assign values of "00000000" to "11111111" corresponding to the six values of "001" to "110" (for example, with even spacing) to maximize the usage

15 of gradation of 8 bits or to assign a value of appropriate range with appropriate spaces to allow more easily viewable display.

After a data conversion process at the draft-design processor circuit 20 is completed, pixel data $P0'(d)$ is output from the

20 draft-design processor circuit 20 to the selector 22. The selector 22 selects one of the regular pixel data and the data after the data conversion process. For example, when the user selects a draft-design mode and a draft-design mode selection signal is input to the selector 22, the pixel data $P0'(d)$ converted into a data

25 of 8 bits input from the digit-complementing circuit 18 is output to the brightness signal generator circuit 24 and to the color signal generator circuit 26. User selection of the draft-design mode can be realized as follows. When the image processor is constructed as a portion of a digital camera, for example, it is possible to

provide a push button on an external surface of the digital camera and to configure the digital camera such that, when the user presses the push button, a draft-design mode is selected and a draft-design mode selection signal is input to the selector 22.

5 The brightness signal generator circuit 24 applies a process identical to that applied to the regular image data to the input pixel data $P0'(d)$ to generate brightness data and outputs the generated data to a display device (not shown). In the meantime, the color signal generator circuit 26 generates color data, but
10 because the gain value of an amplifier circuit 28 provided following the color signal generator circuit 26 is set to 0, the value of the generated color data is also set to 0. The amplifier circuit 28 sets the gain to 0 only when a draft-design mode selection signal is input.

15 The process described above is the process executed by an image processor according to the present invention. Example images are shown in Figs. 6 and 7. Fig. 6 shows an image which was not processed by the draft-design processor circuit 20, while Fig. 7 shows an image which underwent processing applied by the draft-design
20 processor circuit 20. As shown in Fig. 7, by applying a data conversion process by the draft-design processor circuit 20, the brightness value in regions of similar lightness becomes high and white is output. On the other hand, the brightness value in regions where the lightness changes becomes low and black is output. Because
25 of this, it is possible to obtain, from a regular captured image, an image similar to a draft-design image in which the regions where the lightness changes are emphasized.

In the embodiment described above, a draft-design process is applied to image data captured by a CCD image sensor. In another

preferred embodiment of the present invention, it is also possible to apply the draft-deign process to image data stored in a memory or the like. In addition, when the draft-design process is to be executed using a personal computer or the like, it is possible to
5 make a program for the sequence of the draft-design process. In addition, in the above-described preferred embodiment, the draft-design process is applied to a color image, but the process may alternatively be applied to a monochrome image.